

PATENT APPLICATION

ELECTROSTATIC DISCHARGE (ESD) TOOL FOR ELECTRONIC DEVICE UNDER TEST (DUT) BOARDS

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates generally to the testing of electronic devices, such as packaged integrated circuits (ICs) which are mounted on device under test (DUT) boards, and more particularly the invention relates to a tool for handling DUT boards undergoing electrical testing.

[0002] Integrated circuits are typically tested in computer controlled test equipment in order to identify any defective circuits. The integrated circuits are packaged such as in dual in-line packages (DIPs) which can be plugged into sockets on a printed circuit board (PCB) for testing. The PCB will typically have a plurality of sockets for packaged ICs. Metal traces on the PCB connect the sockets to an edge connector on the PCB which is plugged into the test equipment.

[0003] A serious problem in handling ICs arises from the buildup of static electrical charge in the test environment. The electrostatic charge generally builds up over materials and components due to friction, movement, electrical currents, and other factors. Once such charge is created, it will discharge through any available path to ground or other electrical potential. An uncontrolled and sudden discharge can inadvertently destroy or degrade sensitive electronic devices, such as ICs. In test equipment, such discharge may take place through the user, cables, equipment cabinet frames, and the like.

[0004] Thus, it is critical that the devices being tested are not damaged by ESD either before, during, or after testing. Any such damage may ruin the device or may invalidate any collected test data.

[0005] Normally, the DUT boards are loaded with test devices over a table away from the test system. Once the DUT boards are loaded with test devices, they are carried over to and are connected with the test system. After the test is completed, the DUT boards are moved from the test system and returned to the loading table. The devices are then removed from the DUT board and stored in anti-static tubes.

[0006] Even if all normal precautions are taken, such as having the test operator use a ground strap, anti-ESD mats around the table and the like, there are still potential situations where the test device remains unprotected. Electrical charge can build up while the test

device is inserted into the board test socket, and charge can also build up while transporting the DUT board from the table to the system, especially if the test operator has to disconnect a ground strap to reach the test system. Additionally, charge can build up while the DUT board is inserted or plugged into the test system and again when the DUT board is removed from the test system.

[0007] The only method of fully protecting a device against any type of ESD damage is to have all pins of a test device physically shorted to each other. This will prevent any charge buildup or electrical current flow between pins. Having an individual test device ESD tool does help protect devices most of the time while in transit, but such tools are difficult to remove and install once the board is inserted into the test system. Generally the DUT boards are located in hard to reach areas, and they are often too close to each other to allow the test operator to reach in and install or remove individual anti-ESD tools.

[0008] The present invention is directed to providing an ESD tool for handling DUT boards which overcomes these limitations in the prior art.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] In accordance with the invention, a tool for preventing electrostatic discharge when handling an electronic device under test (DUT) board includes a support frame, guides on one side of the frame for slidably receiving a DUT board, and at least one electrical shorting connector extending from the frame and electrically connecting and shorting electrical leads of a device under test. The support frame preferably comprises an electrically conductive material such as aluminum which is electrically connected to the electrical shorting connector.

[0010] In a preferred embodiment, the support frame includes a handle for inserting a DUT board into a test system, and the support frame includes a connector for receiving a plug in patch cord for use in grounding the support frame. Mechanical stops are provided for limiting the travel of a DUT board when inserted into the guides.

[0011] In a preferred embodiment, the electrical shorting connector comprises a fine wire brush which physically and electrically engages leads of socket connectors, and thereby shorts the leads of a device under test which is plugged into the socket. When the DUT board includes more than one row of devices under test, a plurality of electrical shorting connectors is provided whereby all leads of the devices under test are shorted.

[0012] The invention and objects and features thereof will be more fully understood from the following description and appended claims when taken with the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a conventional dual in-line package (DIP) integrated circuit.

[0014] Fig. 2 is a perspective view of a device under test (DUT) board, on which a plurality of DIPs are mounted for testing with an anti-ESD handling tool in accordance with an embodiment of the invention mounted thereto.

[0015] Fig. 3 is a perspective view of the DUT board handling tool shown in Fig. 2.

[0016] Fig. 4 is a perspective view of the DUT board and handling tool of Fig. 2 inverted to show the shorting of DIP leads.

[0017] Fig. 5 is an exploded perspective view of an electrical shorting connector on the handling tool of Figs. 2, 3 and 4 in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0018] Fig. 1 is a perspective view of an integrated circuit housed in a dual in-line package (DIP) shown generally at 10. The DIP has a body portion 12 comprising an epoxy material in which the integrated circuit is housed with two rows of leads 14, 16 extending therefrom.

[0019] Fig. 2 is a perspective view of a DUT board 18 having sockets 20 in which DIPs 10 are inserted for testing. The leads of sockets 20 are interconnected by conductive traces to contacts 22 at one end of board 18 for connecting the board in a test system.

[0020] As noted above, static electricity can build up during the loading and unloading of DIPs 10 in sockets 20 and in handling the boards 18 for insertion into or removal from an electronic test system. In accordance with the invention, an anti-electrostatic discharge (ESD) tool shown generally at 30 in accordance with an embodiment of the invention is provided for preventing electrostatic discharge (ESD) from damaging the DIPs 10. As shown in Fig. 2 and in more detail of Fig. 3, tool 30 includes a frame portion 32 of a conductive metal such as aluminum with two guides 34, 36 on opposing edges of one side of frame 32

for slidably receiving DUT board 18. Stops 38 are provided to limit the travel of DUT board 18 during insertion in the guides. Also mounted on the one side of tool 30 are a plurality of shorting connectors 38 which electrically engage contacts of the test sockets and the lead of DUTs 10.

[0021] Fig. 4 is a perspective view of DUT board 18 and tool 30 of Fig. 2 inverted to show the shorting of the DIP leads. Shorting contacts 38 physically engage the solder points of the socket leads on the bottom of board 18. The shorting contacts thus short the leads of DIPs 10 in the sockets to aluminum tool 30 which thereby prevents damage to the DIPS from electrostatic discharge.

[0022] A handle 42 is provided at one end of tool 30 to facilitate the insertion and removal of board 18 from the test system. Additionally, a patch cord receptacle 44 (Fig. 3) provides for attaching a grounding line to handle of tool 30. Normally, the DUT boards are loaded with test devices over a table away from the test system. Once the DUT boards are loaded, the boards are carried to and connected into the test system. After the test has been completed, the DUT boards are removed from the test system and returned to the loading table where the devices being tested are removed from the board and stored in antistatic tubes. During this time, the patch cord connected to the tool maintains the tool and the DUTs in a grounded state. Once the DUT board 18 is inserted into the test system, tool 30 is removed prior to testing so that the DIP leads are no longer shorted. The tool is then reapplied to the DUT board upon completion of the test for removal of the board.

[0023] Fig. 5 is an exploded perspective view of an electrical shorting connector on the tool of Figs. 2, 3, 4 in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. Fine wire brush 50 is configured to place through slots 52 in frame 32 of tool 30 with plates 54 fastened to frame 32 to maintain the fine wire brush in slots 52 and extending from the other side of frame 32, as shown in Fig. 3, for example. The wire brush provides sufficient rigidity and flexibility so that the solder points 40 on DUT board 18 are physically and electrically contacted when board 18 is inserted fully in guides 34, 36 of tool 30.

[0024] The anti-ESD tool in accordance with the invention has proved to be successful in preventing damaging electrostatic discharge, even when the patch cord is disconnected from the tool. The tool can be custom designed to fit various types and configurations of DUT boards.

[0025] Thus while the invention has been described with reference to specific

embodiments, the description is illustrative of the invention and is not to be construed as limiting the invention. Various modifications and applications may occur to those skilled in the art without departing from the true scope and spirit of the invention as defined by the appended claims.